

LENT IN PRACTICE

(The Spirit of Penance)

By

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OUR MOTHER'S MIND

THE practice of Lent is not today what it was in the past. The black fast common in the day of our fathers and grandfathers, would seem to our day and generation a burden too heavy to be borne: the rules of the fast have been lightened and dispensations are multiplied to fit the burden to the back of a people less physically strong than their forbears, living in a time of hurry and strain. In this the Church has acted as a tender Mother, solicitous for the bodies as well as the souls of her children.

But the Church is not alone a tender Mother: she is first and always a faithful Spouse. The law of Christ is her law, the words of Christ are her words; she would not subtract from them one iota, nor will she ever admit that her children cannot follow where He has led. Others may say that His words must not be taken literally; that His law cannot be rigorously applied in the struggle of our complex life; that no man can aspire to the Christ life. Not so, the Spouse of Christ, the Catholic

Church. She knows and she believes that Christ is the Son of God, the Divine Word: that He is Eternal Truth Who can neither deceive nor be deceived: that He is Infinite Wisdom Whose commands are possible and Whose counsels are delightful. Has He not said: "Follow Me," and "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life"?

Now the command to do penance was uttered by her Lord and Master in no uncertain terms: "Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish" (Luke xiii. 3-5). And again, after His resurrection, He built up the faltering faith of His disciples by asserting the necessity of His Passion and of the continuance of the work of penance: "It behooved Christ to suffer and to rise again from the dead the third day: that penance and remission of sins should be preached in His Name" (Luke xxiv. 46, 47). How, then, may we reconcile the mitigation of the fast and multiplied dispensations with the Church's fidelity to the exact teaching of the Master? To find the answer we must penetrate more deeply the mind of our Mother; we must analyze more carefully the meaning of penance and study its purposes more attentively.

If we look into the mind of our Mother, we will find her always tender, often indulgent, but never weak: her aim is not to spoil, but to strengthen: to build up, not to tear down. What she concedes to the weakness of the body is not to enervate the soul

but to provide it with a more virile temple, a more active co-partner in the following of Christ. If the external circumstances of penance are changed, it is only to stress more deeply the hidden significance of the inevitable divine law: "Unless you do penance, you shall all likewise perish." Every year the Holy Spirit within her invites her children, most urgently, to turn aside from the busy marts of men and follow our Lord into the desert. Those whose strength permits them the privilege of sharing literally His fast, she warns that "the letter without the spirit is dead"; those whose weakness does not permit them that privilege, she reminds that they are not thereby excused. For them, too, is the ringing call of the Master: "Deny thyself, take up thy cross and follow Me," and it may not be evaded: all may not fast with Christ but all must pray with Him in the desert, if they would not perish.

Now, then, as never before, perhaps, it becomes us to take stock of what Lent is to mean to us in practice, to enter more fully into the self-denials of prayer and acquire more truly the spirit of penance.

Only thus will we be really in touch with the mind of our Mother, faithful to the leading of the Holy Spirit of Love, and obedient to the behest of our Divine Savior and Model: "Be ye perfect." For, as St. Paul reminds us, only "if we be dead with Him," shall we "also live with Him" (2 Tim. ii. 11).

THE SPIRIT OF PENANCE

The idea of penance is all too commonly associated with the external act. This materialistic notion of penance works one of two evils: its entire neglect or its unworthy performance. The superficial are satisfied in the external act of penance; the self-indulgent find it too burdensome to attempt. So penance has lost its prestige and our age has wandered far from its spirit. A confirmation of this, which needs no commentary, is the dictionary definition which declares the word obsolete except as applied to the sacramental penance given by the priest. This is an index of how almost entirely the idea of penance is lost outside the Church, and it would often seem that, even in the minds of the children of the Church, its practice is frequently restricted to this sacred obligation lightly performed. And yet penance is an essential for everlasting life. And why?

Because all true penance is in its nature sacramental: it is an outward sign of inward grace. Its action is twofold: it is not only a turning away from sin but a re-turning unto God. Indeed the closer union of the soul with God is the primary purpose of penance and it fails of its purpose when it fails in this. Man was made for God; sin frustrated this

purpose; the Passion and Death of the Man-God alone was capable of restoring the union severed by sin: of admitting mankind again to the state of grace; only the application of the merits of Jesus Christ to the individual soul enables it to "bring forth fruits worthy of penance." In other words, outside of the state of grace, no act, however good in itself, is efficacious for expiation. This fact shows that penance indicates a state of grace: sorrow for sin and a certain union with Christ, and implies a strong motion towards closer union with Him. This interior and necessary quality of penance cannot be too strongly accentuated. Without it a lifetime spent in good works is waste; with it every simplest thought, word or deed enriches the soul with the infinite treasures of Divine Love and gives immense glory to God: "In this is My Father glorified; that you bring forth very much fruit, and become My disciples" (John xv. 8).

Truly, therefore, the external act is but a means to an end, and that end is not the self-satisfaction of having expiated personal sin but the impulse of love to remove all that is obnoxious to the Beloved, that withdraws the soul from His embrace. It is but the body giving effect to the will of the spirit which vivifies and impels it. The external act of penance is good, even necessary, as the tangible and visible expression of the soul's purpose to remove every obstacle that impedes its progress towards

God, but lacking the true spirit, it resolves itself into dust.

This interior purpose shines through every penance prescribed by the Church. During the seasons of penance, and most especially during Lent, she urges us to turn aside, not only from sinful pursuits but even from those harmless and legitimate, in order to have more time for God: to enter more fully into the life of Christ; to participate in His Passion as willing disciples and explore the depths of His love. We frustrate this purpose when we compromise with this spirit and find ready excuse for frequenting entertainments, not evil to be sure, but time consuming and fatiguing, leaving less time and taste for prayer, an inability to rise for early Mass, an unreadiness for Holy Communion. The prescription of the marriage ceremony, the counsel to continence has in view the purification and uplifting of the bond of human love. In withdrawal the soul sees in better perspective the divine purposes of matrimony and its holy responsibilities: abstinence cultivates strength in unselfishness and subordinates lust to reason and will. The very mitigations of the law of fast and abstinence in regard of food, prove that the law was not fashioned as an end in itself, but to cultivate temperance and force home the purpose of appetite: to preserve life; and to enforce the spiritual truth that we must come to God empty, if we would be filled.

It thus becomes evident that weakness of body neither excuses nor debars from penance. The spirit of the law is open to all. And in the practical cultivation of this spirit, the letter of the law will acquire new meaning and attraction. Far from wishing to elude it, many will seek to fulfill it in larger measure.

What we will make of Lent in practice depends upon ourselves. The opportunities are large and the grace of God sufficient.

THE POWER OF GOD

St. Paul, beset and exhausted by temptation, cried out to the Lord to remove it. For answer he received this encouraging word which we must take to ourselves at the very outset of Lent: "My grace is sufficient for thee; for power is made perfect in infirmity." All will be well with us in our practice of Lent, if, sincerely and humbly, we make response with the great Apostle: "Gladly therefore will I glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may dwell in me" (2 Cor. xii. 9). Here we have the complete matter of penance: our infirmities driving us into the very arms of Christ. We turn from self and draw closer to Him through the recognition of our weakness.

On the first Sunday of Lent the Church sets before us that great mystery of Christ's love: His temptation. A love that induced the Son of God to submit to the ignominy of temptation *for our sakes*, is incomprehensible to us. We can only worship and return thanks to the divine Goodness for this ineffable condescension of love, so full of instruction and consolation for His would-be disciples. Jesus, Infinite Purity, the Son of the living God, subjected to temptation from the devil is a divine Witness to the truth that temptation is not sin, unless we yield to it; that, on the contrary, it is a

fruitful opportunity for God, if in all humility and holy fear, we invoke the power of God against the wiles of Satan. It affords us, moreover, a consolation and source of strength which, without it, we would never have dared to hope for: that Jesus, in Whom we "can do all things," is our Companion even in moments of temptation. Without this assurance we would surely falter and fail. To be sure, the temptations of our Lord were purely from without: He was tempted by the devil not, as we are also, by that "darkness of the understanding, weakness of the will and propensity to evil," left in the soul as the effect of original sin and against which every son and daughter of Adam and Eve must struggle from birth to death. These subjective temptations that come from ourselves, Our Blessed Lord could not know, but the objective temptations He permitted the devil to present to Him were none the less real, and, in His Providence, were destined not only for our encouragement, but to afford us Example in every field of temptation.

In the first temptation our Lord was urged to yield to the necessities of the body. His answer teaches us how to meet every temptation that would pander to the importunities or weariness of the flesh. Truly "not in bread alone does man live but by every word that proceedeth from the mouth of God" (Matt. iv. 4). This example is warranted to gird us against every inclination to sloth and sensu-

ality; to weigh the material food against the spiritual and find it wanting. By the strength of it the saints have risen to unapproachable heights of mortification and self-denial. To such heights we may not be called, yet daily in little things and big we must prefer the spiritual to the material food. Under this head falls even the temptation not to rise for Mass because we are tired, or to sit up late and talk with some loved companion instead of foreseeing and forestalling the fatigue of the day to come. Not for one moment is the sweet food of human society to be preferred to that privileged intercourse with the Divine Wisdom in Holy Communion. This giving the higher place to the nourishment of the Word of God, alone can munition us against the myriad temptations that will assault our resolution to accept the Lenten invitation of Mother Church to turn aside and go into the desert with Christ.

The second temptation of our Lord gives us example how to meet the insidious temptation to presumption on God's care and mercy: of spiritual sloth. Confidence in the power of God must never degenerate into an easy-going presumption; it must never excuse inanition or supplant personal effort to the limit of ability. "Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God" to save you from the consequences of your own sins of omission or commission. It is a sin of presumption to take chances in dress and conduct; to court the doubtful and expect to be pre-

served from insult and from sin. God's power must not be invoked to save us trouble—physical, mental or spiritual. God's power is always ready to sustain effort, to give it efficacy: to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves of ourselves. Let us enter into the practice of Lent with earnest industry; in it let us deny ourselves daring and questionable acts unbecoming children of God and followers of Jesus Christ.

The third temptation of our Lord warns us against the pride of life: the desire for power, esteem; the spirit that takes credit to self and covets adulation and recognition. It seeks us out in a thousand shapes, drawing us further and further from the worship and service of God. Honesty is sacrificed to business policy, social advantage is preferred to religious education, popularity to principle, personal adornment leaves no time for prayer, the little word that might be spoken for God and truth is left unspoken for fear of ridicule, the influence that might be exerted for souls is neglected as too troublesome, and so the sinuous serpent of worldliness winds its way into our lives holding us fast in its coils and poisoning our spiritual life. We worship the golden serpent rather than the Cross of Christ. We must be armored in the world of our Lord if we would escape the slow poison: "The Lord, thy God thou shalt adore and Him only shalt thou serve" (Matt. iv. 10).

To meet and to vanquish, by the power of God these temptations, that is the practice of true penance. They will assail us on every side in our practice of Lent. To do battle with the obstacles that impede our way to God, the Church invites us in this holy season, and to encourage us in the fight, she holds out to us promises of such astounding beauty as to lure us to scale the very heights of Calvary.

THE PERPETUATION OF CALVARY

Every day upon our altars Calvary is perpetuated: "from the rising of the sun even to the going down . . . there is offered a clean oblation" (Mal. i. 11). Infinite Purity to Infinite Majesty. Daily, hourly Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God "empties Himself" not only of every suggestion of His Divinity, but of every semblance of His Manhood. For our sakes He becomes utter Sacrifice. This inconceivable Self-Sacrifice of Divine Love takes place at our very doors, day in and day out, and most frequently we ignore It. A thousand petty reasons of comfort or convenience hold us excused from accepting the invitations lavished upon us by our Mother, the Church, to come to the Mount of Calvary and be drawn to Him Who is "lifted up" for us in the Holy Sacrifice. Or perhaps we come so full of self, so wrapped in preoccupations that Christ comes and goes because He finds no place for Him within our hearts. This is the most enormous of all daily tragedies.

To gauge the immensity of this waste of opportunity, we need only explore the liturgy of the Mass. There we find invitations so pressing and promises so vast that our minds seem too small and our hearts too narrow to grasp them. Yet they are the inspired words of God, Who is Truth. Day by day the Church sets them before us as if to lure us to

the mount of Sacrifice with the sweets of divine love. Nowhere is this purpose more patent than in the season of Lent. At the very outset she says to us so solemnly: "Thus saith the Lord: Be converted to Me with all your heart, in fasting and in weeping and in mourning. And rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God, for He is *gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy*. . . . I will send you corn and wine and oil and you shall be filled" (Joel ii). Plainly stating the need for conversion accompanied by external penance, she accentuates the deep truth that it is the heart that must be broken open to the influences of God, and sets before it a picture of that God calculated to melt a heart of stone—a gracious God waiting to fill in plentiful measure the heart rent to admit Him.

Again, as if she would forestall the possible temptation to consider or protect self, she urges: "Cast thy care upon the Lord and He shall sustain thee" (Psalm liv.). Dost thou fear to pay too great a penalty of fatigue for going to the mount of Sacrifice; art thou troubled about the cares of life, or fearful to abandon self to God lest He ask too much? Cast thy care upon the Lord, for "thus saith the Lord: I have heard thy prayer and have seen thy tears: behold I will add to thy days." "I will come and heal." Or she exacts the practical exercise of Christian charity: "Love your enemies,

do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you; *that you may be the children of your Father,*” and sums it up in that tremendous command: “Be you perfect as also your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt. v. 28), buoying us to effort by the promise of reward from the All-seeing Father.

In Holy Mass the Passion and Death of our Lord is not a memory but a fact. No wonder that the Church is lavish of invitations to draw us into this holy way; that she counts attendance at Mass as the first and most important step in the practice of Lent. Nowhere as here will the humility of Christ so shame our pride; the immensity of His Sacrifice so stimulate our zeal; nowhere else will we find His teaching more vivid, His example more palpitating. If we have not heeded His invitation hitherto, let us come to Him now, and make daily Mass our practice for Lent. If it is already our blessed habit to do so, we may still find ample practice for penance in increase of punctuality, in intensified fervor. We have never assisted at Mass so well, that we may not do so better. There is always room for great self-denial in our mode of prayer: of reaching out to closer coöperation with the ends and aims of our Divine Victim Who offers Himself for the glory of God, for the salvation of all souls, in thanksgiving for God’s gifts, in atonement for man’s many sins.

For if in our manner of hearing Mass we endeavor more and more to realize it as the perpetuation of Calvary, fervor will inevitably put forth new leaves and our whole being will begin to grow "unto the measure of Christ." Self will not loom so large and obstruct our view of the heavens. A practical step in this direction is to follow the Mass word for word in the missal: to feed our minds with the divine word as well as our souls with the divine Presence. Unconsciously minds and hearts brought thus in touch with the mind and Heart of Christ continue to echo His sentiments, to fashion themselves by His example when acted upon by the influences and inducements of the world.

"We exhort you that you receive not the grace of God in vain," says St. Paul, "behold now is the acceptable time; behold now is the day of salvation." If we make the effort that in us lies to brush aside difficulties, to surmount obstacles that must surely be met in the following of Christ to the mount of Sacrifice in Holy Mass, we will not struggle alone. The Church promises that "the Lord will overshadow thee with His shoulders and under His wings thou shalt trust: His truth shall compass thee with a shield" (Psalm xc.). How wonderfully close God is to us at Mass: there He shares our humanity that we may be made "partakers of His divinity": there He is Jesus Christ, the Man-God.

Come, then, and "dwell in the house of the

Lord” and “the Lord will fill thy soul with brightness, and thou shalt be like a watered garden and like a fountain of water whose waters shall not fail” (Isaiah lviii.).

THE BREAD OF LIFE

Man must eat to live. God created him under this necessity: it is a law of physical life. To make sweet the burden and light the yoke of maintaining life, God gave appetite, or desire for food, and taste to find it agreeable. Loss of taste begets loss of appetite; loss of appetite indicates ill-health. Or we may have a morbid appetite and a perverted taste, craving certain things out of proportion, or things injurious to life. We call this condition morbid, because it is opposed to life; it makes for disease and death: it is opposed to law. Man must eat to live, man does not live to eat. There is much food for penance in subjecting appetite and taste to law and order; in using these gifts of God according to His will: to maintain life in full health and efficiency, in so far as in us lies, for His service. How may we tonic our souls for such penance?

Food is no less a necessity in the spiritual life; spiritually man must eat to live: "Except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood you shall not have life in you" (John vi. 54). For, our Lord solemnly asserts, "My flesh is meat indeed and My blood is drink indeed" (John vi. 56). That, in the order of grace, appetite and taste for this heavenly food, the Bread of Life, are given to us, is no less certain, for Our Blessed Lord assures

us that He came to give us "abundant" life; He urges us to "come" unto Him; to "taste and see that the Lord is sweet." If we have no appetite for the Bread of Life, our souls are sick; if we have no taste for It, it is because it is cloyed with material things. Spiritually this is a morbid, a wrong condition of soul. We are too apt to think appetite and taste for God are unnatural, extraordinary: They are supernatural, to be sure—above nature, but they are not unnatural—against nature, for God made man for Himself, and Jesus Christ, the God-Man was "lifted up" to "draw all men unto Him." By every wile and device of love He has poured Himself out to fill and to satisfy our every want and craving. We must indeed be unnatural ingrates, if we are devoid of some measure of desire for Him. If a strong appetite for the heavenly Bread be extraordinary, it is not because God wills it so, but rather because we have "gone aside into our own way": because we do not eat to live.

For is it conceivable that Jesus Christ should have so "emptied Himself" as we have seen in the Holy Sacrifice; that He should assume the appearance of bread and wine and dwell with us day and night in order to nourish our souls, and then not give us the ability to desire and to seek Him? Would He stay there if He wished us to stay away?

No. Frequent, daily Communion should be the complement of daily Mass in our practice of Lent.

If this is already our practice, we may still cultivate a stronger appetite, a greater taste. Asking the Holy Spirit to give us a "love and relish" for the Bread of Life, our devotion should increase, until we find this heavenly banquet more savory than all the feasts of earth. Our soul will be filled with "brightness," the "Brightness of His Glory" (Heb. i. 3), and we shall indeed be "a fountain of water whose waters shall not fail." "I live, not I, but Christ Jesus liveth in me," exclaimed St. Paul. This is the Catholic life: for this Christ came into the world.

How may we attain to it? By feeding and feeding again; by overcoming all obstacles that would hold us from this perfect Communion of our whole selves, body and soul, with Jesus Christ, whole and entire, Body, Blood, Soul and Divinity. It will cost something to wash oneself cleaner and cleaner in the sacrament of penance; to adorn ourselves more and more with true charity, for our Lord said if we came to the altar and our brother had something against us, we must go back first and be reconciled to our brother. We will have the humility to go to Him in spite of our unworthiness, because of our absolute necessity. We will have the courage to let Him shape our thoughts by His thoughts, to look at ourselves by His effulgent Light, yet not to die of shame; to seek His glory, not our satisfaction.

In the strength of this Bread we will be able to

mortify the false appetites and tastes of the flesh, to mold our wills to the divine will; in its strength we will walk unto the mountain of God and speak with Him heart to Heart.

CONVERSE WITH GOD

Some people are good talkers; others are good listeners; some are both, and others are neither. To speak enough and not to monopolize conversation; to listen attentively, not apparently: these are the arts that make a wise and a full man. The man who monopolizes conversation is full only of himself, and he learns nothing from others. The man who listens inattentively may be more unselfish, more polite, but he is scarcely more wise. Conversation implies a give and take: it means to speak with a person, not merely to him.

Many people make their prayer a constant murmur of petition: they talk to God, they do not converse with Him. They are so full of their own concerns that they have no time to listen, they must pour it all out, and then rush back to be again "troubled with many things." They have faith that God will hear them but they have no faith that they can hear Him. This is why prayer is not more effective; why so many souls never grow to the "full measure of Christ."

God can and does speak to the soul in many ways. He speaks in the voice of conscience that urges to do or warns us not to do this or that; He speaks in inspirations that come to the soul at Mass, after Holy Communion, in silent prayer when

we cease our babble and stop to listen; He speaks in incentive to “approve the better things,” to raise our standard, to deny self something, to have time for something better. As truly as Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, is present in the Blessed Sacrament to be our spiritual food, so truly is the Holy Spirit, the Third Person of the Blessed Trinity, in every soul that is in a state of grace: “the kingdom of God is within you.” Nor is He inactive. God is Life and life is activity. We may not see Him, we may not hear Him, but He is there, the Living, All-powerful God Who “breatheth where He will,” there to make us holy —*if we will but let Him*, for He is the Sanctifier.

Whatever aspiration we have toward God; whatever we accomplish in His service are evidences of the abiding presence and the fruitful processes of the Holy Spirit. Under this same Spirit of Divine Love, the Son of God humbled Himself and became man: and through that same Spirit was His human life fulfilled and His human mission accomplished. Only through Jesus Christ can we know and possess the Holy Spirit Who is God but through Him we have received the Spirit of God. Every sacrament He has given us either bestows, restores or increases the life of the Holy Spirit within us; and we may know and realize Him there more and more, if we will. Here again is matter in abundance for the practice of Lent.

For if we would learn to hearken and understand the Voice that speaks truly, yet not in words, we must cultivate the more unselfish prayer of thanksgiving and adoration; we must read and ponder what we read; we must meditate the life of our Lord, especially His Passion and Death; we must, if God so leads us "lift up our hearts" to the heavens where dwells the Triune God in glorious harmony and incomparable beauty; we must catch in every created beauty suggestion of the Beauty increate; we must find His Voice in the pages of Holy Writ, in the Church's liturgy, in obedience to authority we must seek Him in the silence of the soul, content to be with Him, even though He speak not nor make His Presence felt; we must be true to the suggestions and inspirations that come at such times, humbly obedient to them; we must not lose faith if they do not come, but work confidently by what light we have, begging His blessing and guidance. For the Holy Spirit will guide us, even in little things, if we trust Him more than we do ourselves: if we do our best and leave all in His Hands.

These things are of the very stuff of penance. To do them we must stand ready to deny self and to take up the cross. Charity will glow within us and spread like a flame to all about us. In the cross that God's Hand makes over us we learn to find His blessing.

THE OLD MAN

Nature is forever renewing itself. The leaves fall and are replaced by other leaves. The tissues of the body are forever giving place to new tissues. We put off the old to be clothed with the new. The process of living is a process of change. Our Lord expressed this law of mutation in words intelligible to the crowd of His own day and of all time: "Unless the grain of wheat falling into the ground die, itself remaineth alone" (John xii. 24). The outer husk must yield to the influences of the soil, burst open and decay to free the germ of life that shoots upward to the sun. Growth is transformation.

So St. Paul says we must "put off the old man" before we can "put on the new." Throughout our practice of Lent we have been conscious of the two-fold action involved in penance of leaving self to draw near to God, even to being clothed with Him. If we have been faithful in attendance at Mass, drawing daily closer to the foot of the cross; if we have fed our souls there with the Bread of Life until Christ rather than ourselves lived in us; if we have sought the Holy Spirit more and more in prayer, good reading, meditation, contemplation, we have had to mortify ourselves in a thousand ways. It has cost us something to put off the old man and to put on Christ. The words: "Deny thyself, take up thy cross and follow Me" have taken

on new meaning. What we have done lightly before, now affords a scruple. The soul seeks to purify self more completely in confession. A greater charity, the "charity of God," hovers over the relations of life. Duties of children to parents, of parents to children; of husband to wife and wife to husband; of employer to employee and employee to employer take on new meaning, as we realize more and more that we are one body in Christ and members one of another. Our bodies steeped in the Precious Blood of Christ, fresh from the altar of Sacrifice command a new reverence: we protect them more surely from the profane gaze of immodesty; we make them not less attractive but more so by adorning them with reticence. We discern as use all that accords with God's purpose in creation; as abuse all that controverts it. Our language becomes more temperate and considered. Our daily work, whatever it may be, opens up new avenues of service: "whatsoever ye do, ye do all to the glory of God." The thought goads us to more honest service, lends an added touch of care to our tasks, a stronger ambition for their perfection. We have fitted to ourselves in intercourse with others something of the "charity of God and the patience of Christ" (2 Thess. iii. 5). We are less unwilling to be alone, less dependent on diversion. Annoyances and interruptions find us more peaceful. We are less boisterous but more joyful.

This is what it means to “put off the old man”: to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ.” As in all the works of God, the transformation will be slow: for a long time it may hardly be perceptible. But if our practice of Lent has been sincere: if we have tried to throw ourselves generously into the rich soil of God’s grace in Holy Mass and Holy Communion and in prayer: if we have rent our hearts and cast off the husk of self-love, some growth is inevitable. For “as Christ is risen from the dead, by the glory of the Father, so we also may walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin may be destroyed, to the end that we serve sin no longer. . . . Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall live also together with Christ: Knowing that Christ rising again from the dead, dieth now no more, death shall no more have dominion over Him. For in that He died to sin, He died once; but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God: so do you also reckon that you are dead to sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans vi. 4-11).

RISEN WITH CHRIST

The aeronaut gains new confidence with each experience in the air. Every trip bears him higher and higher, finding his element more and more in the great spaces of the universe. His horizon is boundless, the firmament is his home.

So too with us. If we "be risen with Christ" we will "seek the things that are above." Lent will not have been an interlude, an episode, but rather a trial trip in which we have gained experience and confidence for greater flights. We have tasted the fruits as well as the fears of penance. We will not hesitate as before to leave earth behind and rise, borne on the strong winds of grace, into the boundless spaces of God. Not that we deny difficulties and dangers. We know only too well that the lightest carelessness of self-confidence will dash us to earth, perhaps fatally. Our confidence rests in the powerful means of God's grace. We soar on the merits of Christ, not our own. The strong winds of prayer and humility bear us up where the Spirit bloweth and carries us where It will. We are at home with God: "the Lord is our firmament."

This is the meaning of Lent in practice: the following of our Lord Jesus Christ into the desert and up to Calvary, the welding of our wills to His in the mastery of love. Then will the Resurrection dawn find us at His feet crying joyously: "Rabboni."

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